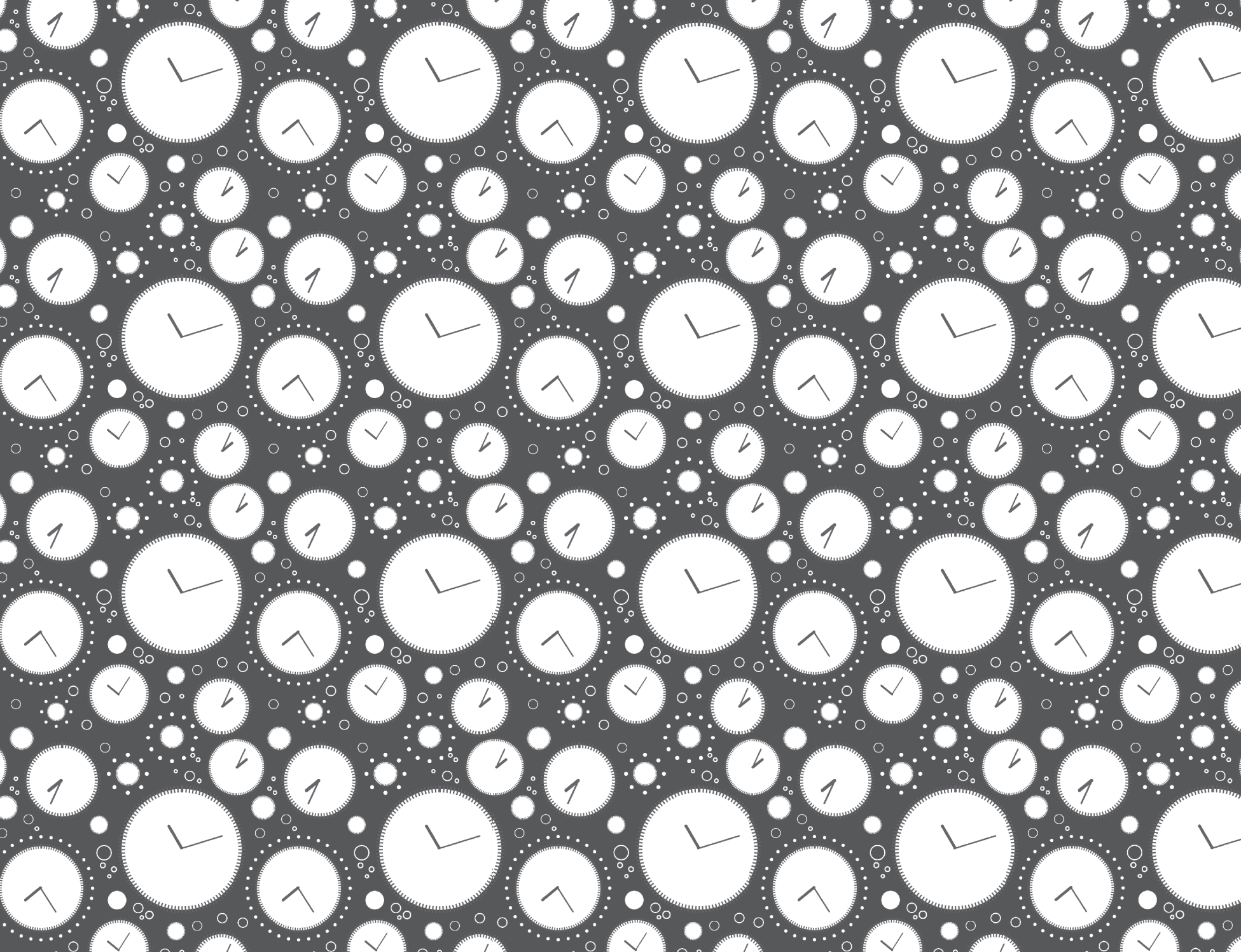


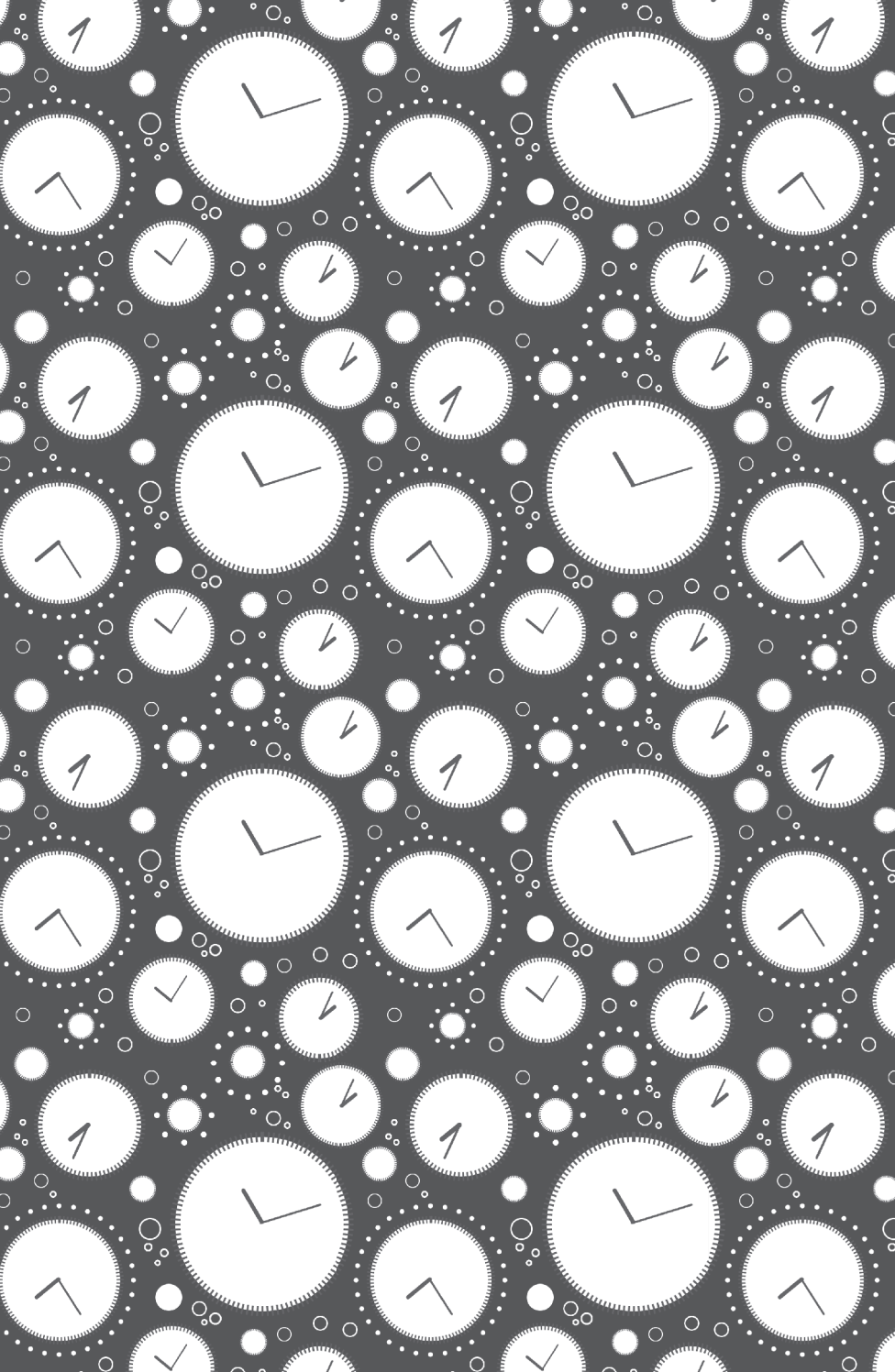
**TIME TRAVEL
TWINS**

THE

MAYA

SACRIFICE





**TIME TRAVEL
TWINS**

THE

MAYA

SACRIFICE

JOSH LACEY

ILLUSTRATED BY GARRY PARSONS



ANDERSEN PRESS

First published in Great Britain in 2025 by
Andersen Press Limited
20 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 2SA, UK
Vijverlaan 48, 3062 HL Rotterdam, Nederland
www.andersenpress.co.uk

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form, or by any
means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise,
without the written permission of the publisher.

The right of Josh Lacey and Garry Parsons to be identified as the
author and the illustrator of this work has been asserted by them in
accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

Text copyright © Josh Lacey, 2025
Illustrations copyright © Garry Parsons, 2025

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data available.

ISBN 978 1 83913 558 3

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

Collect them all!
The Viking Attack
The Roman Invasion
The Stone Age Clash



It was the middle of the winter, and Grandad was ill. He had been ill for the past week, apparently, but hadn't told anyone, not even his family. He didn't want to bother them, he explained.

'Oh, Grandad,' Scarlett said. 'You should have called us. Mum could have made you some of her famous chicken soup.'

'I'm fine,' Grandad said. 'I'm feeling better already.' He slapped his chest cheerfully to prove it, but the effect was spoiled when he started to cough and couldn't stop.

He continued until his face was bright red, then collapsed, exhausted, and lay back against his pillows, wheezing horribly.





Mum, Dad, Scarlett and Thomas stood around the bed, worrying.

They had driven to Grandad's that morning, intending to have a walk in the woods with him, followed by some lunch. But they could all see that Grandad wasn't going to be able to walk anywhere. He looked as if he might not

even be able to get as far as the bathroom without collapsing on the floor.

'You should come home with us,' Mum said. 'Stay for a few days. Let us look after you. Cook you some nice meals. Till you're back on your feet.'

'Please, Grandad! Please! Come and stay!' the twins chorused.

'No, no, don't be silly, there's no need for that,' Grandad said. 'I don't want to be any trouble.'

'You wouldn't be,' Thomas said.

'We'd like having you there,' Scarlett added.

Grandad shook his head. 'I'd much rather be at home in my own bed. Anyway, you don't have to worry about me, I'm feeling much better already.'

As if his own body was determined to prove him wrong, Grandad started coughing again, and he was soon doubled over, red-faced, barely able to breathe.

When he had stopped coughing, calmed down, and managed to start breathing steadily again, Mum gave him a tissue and Dad fetched a glass of water, and the twins stood either side of their grandfather's bed, both of them very upset about his illness. They hated seeing their grandfather like this.

Scarlett had a suggestion for something which might make him feel better. 'Would you like some hot chocolate?'

'I wouldn't say no,' Grandad replied.

'Do you want marshmallows and whipped cream on top?' Thomas asked.

'Go on, then. But I don't think I've got any.'

'Don't worry,' Scarlett said. 'We brought the ingredients from home. We're making hot chocolate for our homework.'

Grandad was amazed. 'Is that what young people do at school these days?'

'We're learning about the Maya,' Scarlett explained.

'The what?' Grandad said.

'They were an ancient civilisation in Central America,' Thomas said.

'You mean the Mayans?'

'No,' Scarlett said. 'They're actually called the Maya.'

'Not in my day,' Grandad said. 'These Maya of yours - they liked hot chocolate, did they?'

Scarlett nodded. 'The Maya built big temples, they wrote records, they discovered zero, they made amazing calendars - and they were the first people to harvest cacao trees.'

'Cacao?' Grandad was still confused. 'Don't you mean cocoa?'

'Chocolate comes from cacao beans,' Thomas explained. 'You pick a cacao fruit from the cacao tree, then grind up the cacao beans to make cocoa powder.'

'A nice cup of hot chocolate would do me a world of good,' Grandad said. 'Here, I'll come downstairs and help you make it.'

He pushed the blankets aside, and was about to swing himself out of bed when his body was wracked by another terrible bout of coughing.

Mum ushered him under the covers again, tucked him in and told him to take it easy. This time, Grandad didn't argue. He fell back against the pillows, exhausted by the effort of trying to get up.

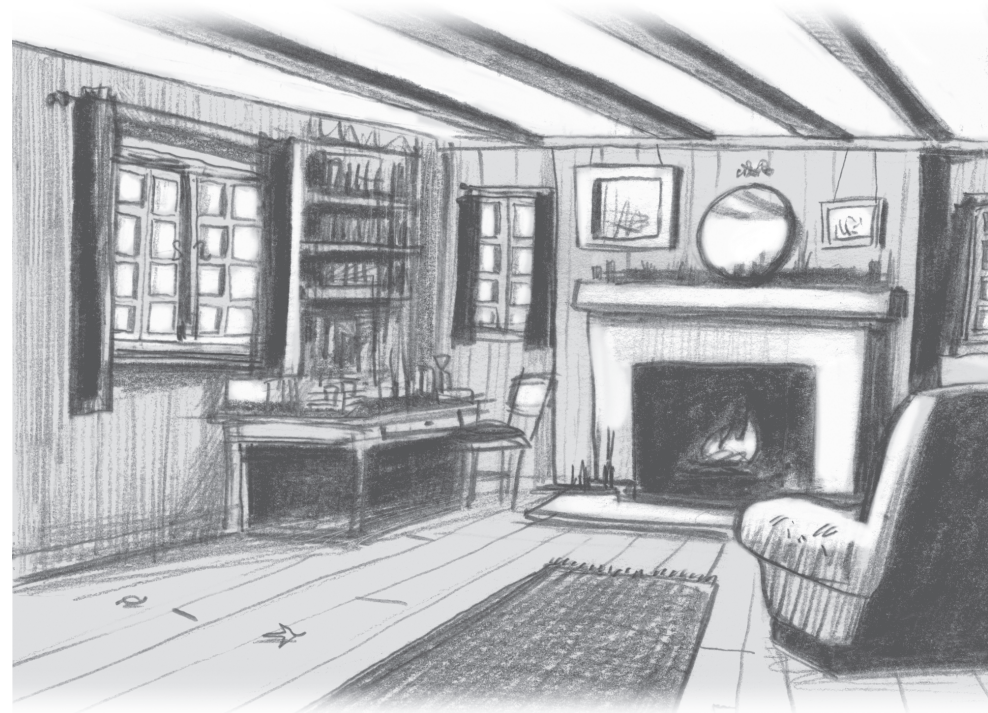
'Maybe it's finally time for you to move somewhere more sensible,' Mum said.

'This house is perfectly sensible,' Grandad replied.

'You must be joking,' Mum said. 'This house is like a war zone. No wonder you've got such an awful cough.'

Grandad lived in a little cottage with no heating except a wood fire downstairs. His home had low ceilings and rickety old windows which allowed chilly breezes to whistle from room to room. His bedroom was icy, sometimes

literally. Throughout the winter, he always wore an extra jumper indoors, and often a hat, gloves and thick socks.



Grandad worked very hard at his inventions, but he didn't spend any time on DIY. He neglected his own health too, and hadn't been to the doctor for years.

While Dad had a look at the windows, trying to work out the best way to mend the gaps and stop the draughts, Thomas and Scarlett went downstairs to the kitchen with their mother to make hot chocolate for everyone.

Thomas fetched five mugs from the cupboard.



Scarlett unpacked the bags and lined up the ingredients on the kitchen table.

A bag of sugar. A carton of milk. A canister of whipped cream. A bag of miniature marshmallows.

And that was all.

One vital ingredient was missing.

‘Where’s the cocoa powder?’ she asked.

‘In the bag,’ Mum replied.

‘It’s not here.’

‘It must be,’ Mum said. ‘I’m sure I packed it. Have another look.’

‘I’ve checked,’ Scarlett said. ‘It’s not there.’

Mum peered into the bag, felt around inside, and even tipped it upside down to make absolutely sure, but Scarlett was right, there was no trace of the cocoa powder.

‘Maybe it’s in the car,’ Mum said.

Scarlett rushed outside to have a look, then returned, shaking her head.

‘I’m so sorry,’ Mum said. ‘I must have left

it at home.'

'Grandad might have some,' Thomas suggested.

The twins searched in the cupboards, under the sink, and anywhere else that Grandad might have hidden a tub of cocoa powder or a sachet of instant hot chocolate, but they couldn't find any.

Mum apologised again. She couldn't understand how she could have packed everything else while leaving the most vital ingredient behind. 'But don't worry,' she said. 'We'll make Grandad a nice cup of tea instead.'

'He needs hot chocolate,' Thomas said. 'If he's going to get better.'

'Let's go and buy some cocoa powder,' Scarlett suggested.

'The nearest shop is miles away,' Mum reminded them as she filled the kettle. 'What Grandad needs is something to eat. I'll make him a sandwich.'

Neither of the twins were happy with that idea. They knew that when they were ill, a cup of tea and a sandwich certainly wouldn't be enough to make them feel any better. What Grandad really needed was a nice cup of hot chocolate topped with oodles of whipped cream and a handful of mini marshmallows.

'Maybe Grandad has some cocoa powder in his workshop,' Thomas suggested.

'He won't,' Mum said.

Scarlett understood immediately what her brother meant. 'Let's go and have a look.'

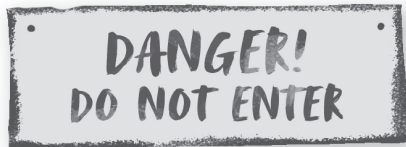
'You can look as much as you want,' Mum said. 'But I tell you one thing for sure. You will not find any cocoa powder in Grandad's workshop.'

'I bet we will,' Thomas said.

'I bet you won't,' Mum replied, but she was talking to herself. The twins had already gone.



Opposite the cottage was a large barn with a notice pinned to the closed door.



The twins ignored the sign, pushed open the door, and hurried into the barn. They didn't bother searching for cocoa powder. They knew Mum was right and there wouldn't be any in the workshop - or not yet, anyway. They would have to go and find it first.

Thomas started getting ready, pulling clothes from the bags where Grandad kept a variety of costumes, ready for a journey to any historical period, but Scarlett was having

second thoughts.

'Maybe this isn't a good idea,' she said. 'Grandad might not like us using the time machine without him.'

'He won't mind,' Thomas said. 'He'll be delighted. Wait till he tastes real hot chocolate from the Maya!'

'Maybe we should ask him,' Scarlett said.

'We can't,' Thomas said. 'Mum or Dad would hear us.'

Scarlett nodded. Her brother was right. They couldn't let their parents know about Grandad's time machine; that would invite too many awkward questions.

'We need to help Grandad,' Thomas insisted. 'You want him to get better, don't you?'

Scarlett nodded. She still felt nervous about using the time machine without her grandfather, but she felt the same way as her brother; she would do anything to help Grandad.

‘I know what we need to do,’ Scarlett replied. ‘Someone has to stay here and look after the machine.’

‘Why?’

‘In case there’s a problem. What if we didn’t come back? What if we’d pressed the wrong button or pulled the wrong lever? Grandad wouldn’t know what had happened to us.’

‘Oh, don’t worry, it’ll be fine,’ Thomas said confidently. ‘We can both go.’

‘We’ll take turns,’ Scarlett insisted. ‘Me first, then you.’

‘Why are you going first?’

‘Because I’m the oldest.’

‘Only by twenty minutes!’

‘Even so.’

‘That’s not fair.’

‘Life isn’t fair,’ Scarlett said.

Thomas sighed. He hated that particular phrase. His mother used it all the time, and Scarlett had started doing the same thing.

But he didn’t say anything. He knew his sister was right: life isn’t fair. Keeping his thoughts to himself, he searched through the dressing-up bags, tipping them upside down, pouring clothes on the floor.

‘This is perfect,’ Thomas said, pulling out a simple cotton tunic. ‘There are two of them. Here, you have this one.’



Neither of them knew what the Maya actually wore, but a tunic should work well enough. They weren't intending to stay for long, anyway. They'd only be picking up some cacao beans, then coming home again and making a nice cup of hot chocolate for their grandfather.

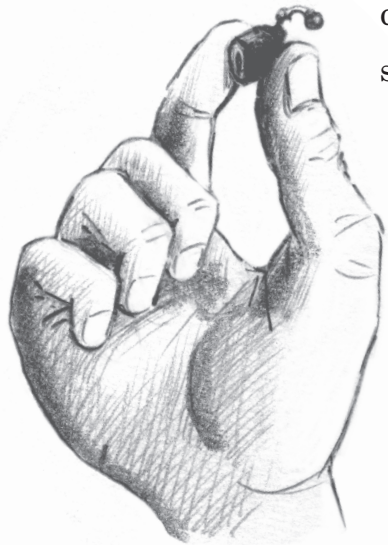
'What about shoes?' Thomas said.

'I don't know what they wore,' Scarlett replied. 'Maybe we should go barefoot.'

They tugged off their shoes and socks.

Next they hurried over to Grandad's workbench, where several devices awaited them. They selected two tiny earpieces and two transmitters.

First they fixed the transmitters in each other's mouths, securing them to the back of their front teeth.



Then they each fitted a tiny translator into their ears.

With the help of these two devices, the twins would be able to speak and understand any human language that had ever been spoken on Earth.

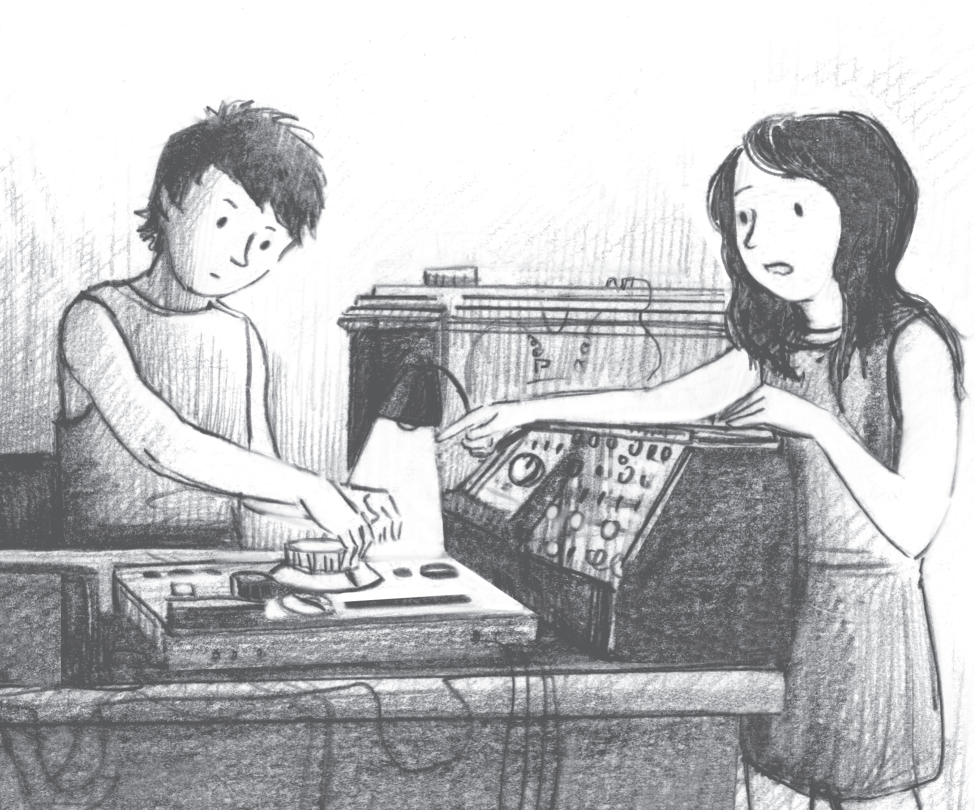
Next each of them pocketed a device which was about the size of a phone and had a single button in its centre. Press that button and they would be returned to the place and time from where they had started.

Now the twins were ready to travel through a wormhole to the past, fetch some cacao beans from the Maya and brew a delicious drink which would fill their grandfather with energy and make him feel well again.

One corner of the workshop was dominated by an enormous machine, which Grandad had been building for the past few years. Thomas sat down at the controls. He flicked the main switch from OFF to ON. With a deep groan,

the machine shuddered into life. The walls wobbled, the roof quivered, the lights flickered and the air itself seemed to grow tense with anticipation.

Scarlett was worried that her brother might have pressed the wrong buttons or pulled the wrong levers, but Thomas felt entirely confident. He was sure he'd done everything perfectly.



‘Where exactly are we going?’ Thomas asked his sister.

‘Tikal,’ Scarlett replied.

‘Where’s that?’

‘Guatemala.’

Thomas tapped the keyboard and selected the correct location. ‘What year are we going back to?’

‘The Maya lived in Tikal for about two thousand years, but I think we should go back to the year 859 AD.’

‘Why?’

‘That’s the same year we met Alfred,’ Scarlett said. ‘Remember?’

‘Obviously.’

Thomas and Scarlett had previously travelled back to the time of the Vikings and the Anglo-Saxons, where they had met a boy who would grow up to become King Alfred the First, better known as Alfred the Great.

Scarlett said, ‘I’d like to see what was

happening in America at the same time as the Vikings were fighting the Anglo-Saxons in England.'

Thomas nodded. That did sound interesting. He spun the dial back a thousand years, then another couple of hundred, and finally a few more, until he arrived at the year 859.

'Are you sure you're doing that right?' Scarlett asked.

'Oh, stop being so anxious,' Thomas said. 'I know what I'm doing. Trust me.'

As soon as the dial reached the correct setting, Thomas pulled a couple of levers, tapped a command on the keyboard and pressed a button.

'It's ready,' he said. He jumped to his feet. 'Let's go.'

'Wait a minute,' Scarlett replied. 'Remember what we agreed? You need to stay here and look after the machine.'

'No,' Thomas said. 'I'm going too. Whether

you like it or not.'

'But we agreed—'

'We didn't agree anything. You said life wasn't fair. I think it should be. So I'm coming too. Come on. Let's go.'

'Wait! Thomas! I said wait!'

But her brother took no notice. He marched towards the doorway in the middle of the time machine.

'Don't you dare,' Scarlett said.



Thomas had already stepped through the doorway and disappeared into the darkness on the other side.

Scarlett shook her head. Her brother was so annoying. She couldn't go with him. It wouldn't be safe. One of them had to stay here in case something went wrong.

Luckily, she wouldn't have to wait long. She knew how the time machine worked. When you went through its doorway, you travelled to a different time and place, where you might stay for hours, days or even years, but when you pressed the button on your device and returned to the present, no more than a fraction of a second would have passed.

There was only one problem. While these thoughts had been passing through her mind, a second had passed. No, more than a second. Ten at least. And now more. Maybe half a minute had gone. So where was her brother?

Scarlett waited, and waited, but still her

twin didn't return through the doorway.

What had happened to him?

There was only one possible explanation. Thomas was trapped in the past. He had been attacked and wounded. Or imprisoned. Somehow he had been unable to use his device to get back to the present.

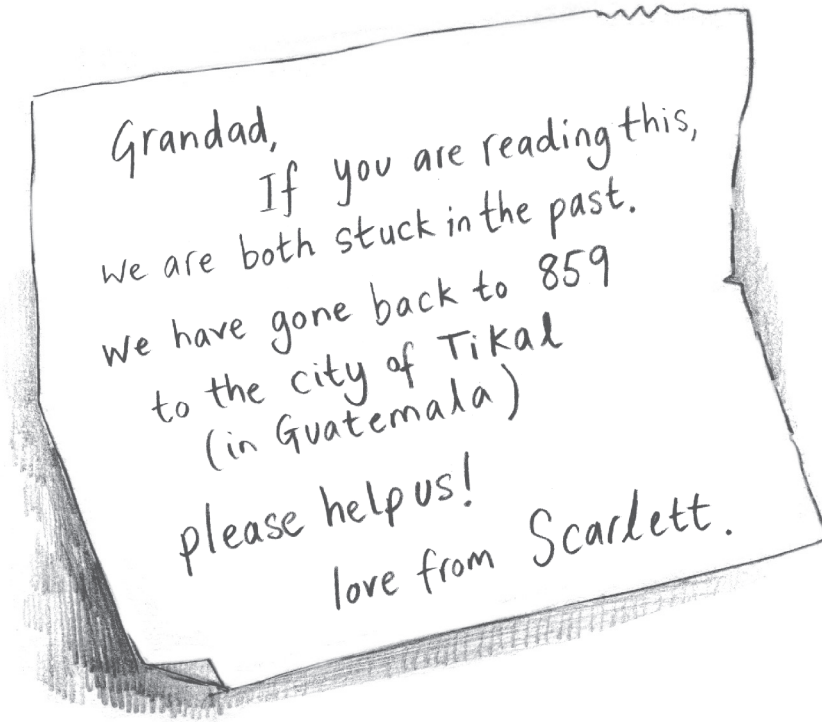
They couldn't communicate with one another across the centuries. There was no way for Scarlett to find out what had gone wrong. She would have to go back to the past and find him.

Otherwise Thomas would be trapped in the 800s for the rest of his life.

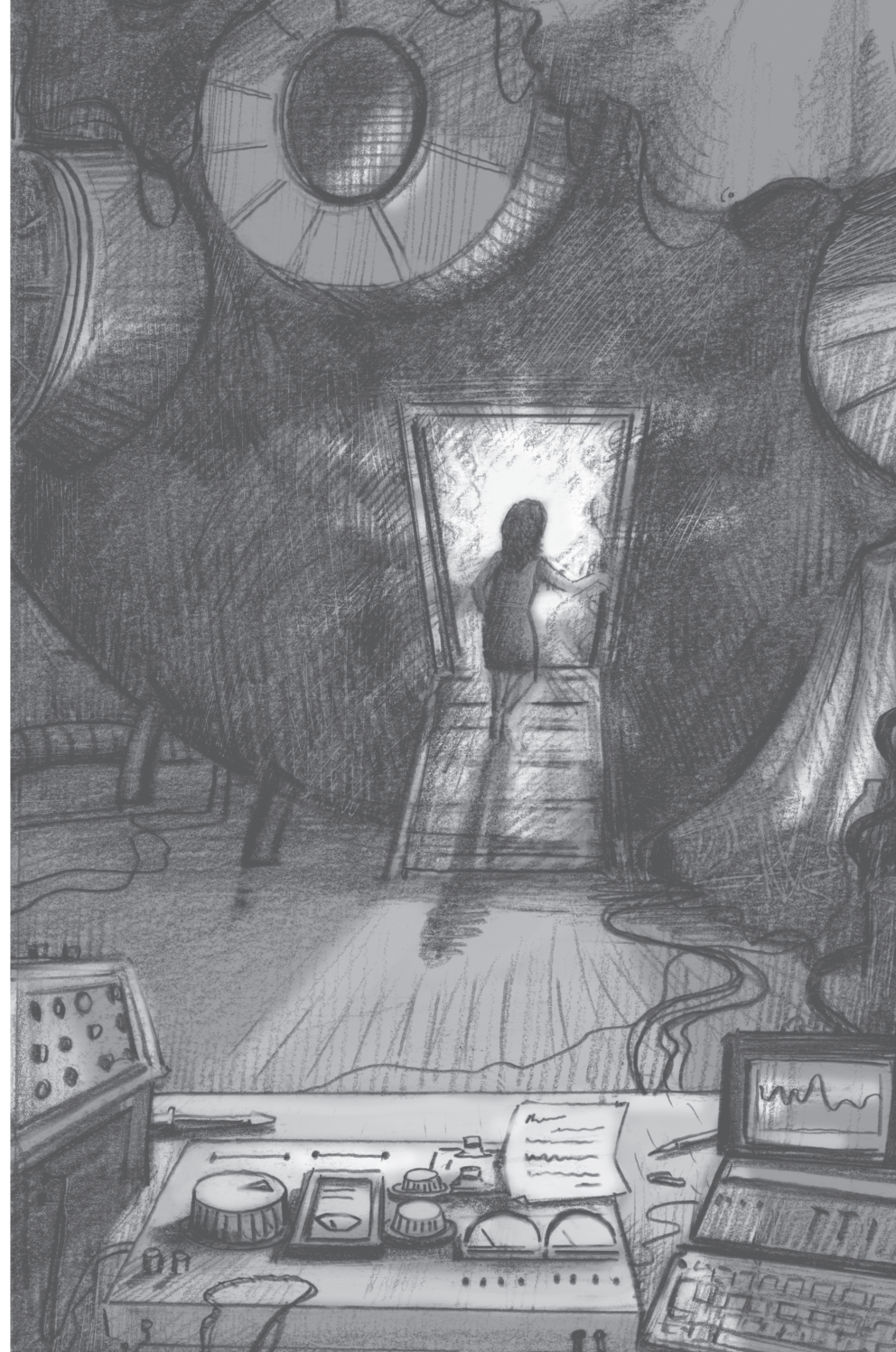
Scarlett felt scared. If she got stuck too, there would be no one to rescue her. They would be trapped together, separated from their friends and family by more than a thousand years, unable to return home.

She had an idea. She grabbed a pencil and a scrap of paper, and scrawled a quick note to

her grandfather.



She left the note on the desk, propped against the keyboard. Then she climbed the stairs that led into the heart of the time machine, stepped through the doorway and plunged into the darkness on the other side.





The heat.

That was the first thing that Thomas noticed. The unbelievable, unbearable heat. He felt as if he had been thrust into an oven.

The next thing that he noticed was the light.

He was surrounded by trees, and the sky was thick with leaves, but a fierce crisp bright sunlight forced its way through the thick foliage.

After the heat and the light, the third thing that he noticed was the tree opposite him.

Thomas laughed out loud. He couldn't believe his good luck. The wormhole had done its job perfectly and delivered him exactly where he wanted to be. He was standing next

to a cacao tree.

How did he know? Because he recognised the tree and its fruit instantly. He had seen pictures of the same type of tree at school last week, when they'd watched a movie about cacao farmers.



He remembered a useful fact from the movie. A cacao tree has one particularly unusual and distinctive feature. Usually the fruit of a tree grows from the ends of its branches. That's true of apples, pears, plums and every other fruit that Thomas could imagine. But cacao trees are different. The fruit grows directly from the trunk and the biggest branches.

He reached for one of the large reddish-brown fruits and plucked it easily from the branch. The cacao fruit felt heavy in his hands.

Mission accomplished. He could go home. Back to Scarlett, who would be sitting at the controls, annoyed and impatient, exactly as he left her.

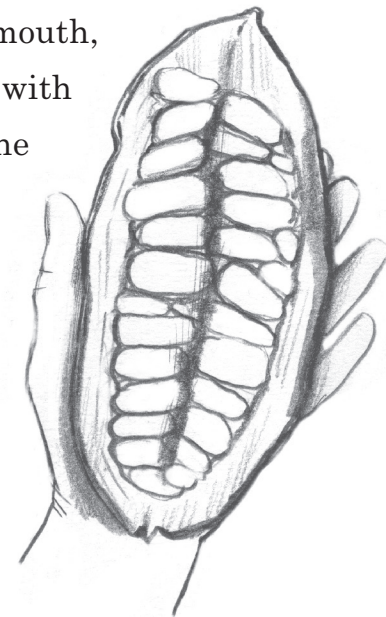
He reached for the device in his pocket, then stopped himself. No, he needed to do one thing before he went home. First he would try the cacao. Taste the seeds. Make sure the fruit was a good one. Perfectly ripe.

On the videos that he had watched at school,

people had broken open their cacao fruit with a knife or a machete, but Thomas didn't have anything like that, only his hands. He knelt on the ground, trapped the fruit under his knee and pulled the end upwards. He wasn't strong enough. The fruit kept wriggling away. He thumped it against a tree trunk, but the fruit refused to break open. He stamped on it, wrestled with it, and finally, after many attempts, managed to snap it in half, exposing the oozing white goo inside, protecting a row of cacao beans.

He lifted the fruit to his mouth, stuck out his tongue, and with the tip tentatively licked the white pulp. To his surprise, it was soft, sweet and delicious, tasting like a cross between a melon and a mango.

He put the fruit on the



ground and dug out a small, brown bean. He popped it between his lips, rolled it around his mouth, then bit down.

As the bitter cacao flooded through his mouth, he felt two hands clamp around his shoulders and a voice cried out: 'Got you! Thief!'